

tangibility ?



UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

CLAIRE BARCLAY: **Untitled 1996**

STEPHEN BUSH & JAN NELSON: **South Face 1996**

**Plimsoll Gallery
Centre for the Arts
Hobart**

JOHN R. NEESON: **Sixth Location 1996**

**Powder Magazine
Queen's Domain
Hobart**

JONATHAN HOLMES **Keep in Touch**

In January 1855, the French painter, Gustave Courbet wrote to his friend, the novelist and critic Champfleury, to tell him about an immense painting which he had just embarked upon. The work, which was 3.590 x 5.980 metres, was, so Courbet said, the picture which would prove that neither he nor the movement Realism was dead.¹ For the past decade, he had been seen as one of the most ambitious and radical artists of his generation, loathed by the conservatives and hailed as a great realist painter by left-wing supporters.

The Painter's Studio, Real Allegory Determining a Phase of Seven Years in My Artistic Life was completed in just over four months in the autumn and winter of 1854-1855, and Courbet, ever the ambitious painter, seems to have had in mind that a massive expo, the *Exposition Universelle*, was coming up in the early summer of 1855 and he was looking to have a major new work, a manifesto of Realism, ready for the opening. Shortly before the completion of the work, however, he became quite ill with an attack of jaundice and the painting wasn't anywhere near completion when the submission date fell due. Furthermore, when he submitted a large body of paintings to the jury responsible for selecting the 5000 paintings, sculptures

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and prints, he had only eleven minor works accepted. And to make matters worse (at least from egocentric Courbet's perspective) the organisers of the *Exposition Universelle* accorded Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres and Eugène Delacroix major retrospective exhibitions - the first of their illustrious careers and an unusual occurrence anyway in the history of public exhibition in France up until that date.

Courbet was ropeable and he set about building a substantial temporary gallery adjacent to the Exposition grounds, his *Pavillon Réelle*, in which to display a further forty of his own paintings. He charged 50 centimes (half the price of entry into the major exposition) and into the *Pavillon Réelle* went *The Painter's Studio* along with several earlier masterpieces, including *The Burial at Ornans*, *The Sleeping Spinner* and *The Bathers*.

¹ Courbet, G. 'To Champfleury'. *Letters*, Paris, January, 1855. Reprinted in Holt, Elizabeth Gilmore. *From the Classicists to the Impressionists: Art and Architecture in the 19th Century*. Volume III of *A Documentary History of Art*, New York: Anchor, 1966, page 348

Courbet had been no stranger to controversy: both *The Burial at Ornans* and *The Bathers* had caused outrage when exhibited in the annual Salon exhibition in 1851 and 1853 respectively. In caricatures of *The Bathers*, for instance, there were captions like: "A 45 year old woman at the point of washing herself for the first time in her life in the hope of relieving her varicose veins;"² and elsewhere the bather emerging from the water was likened to a massive pitted tree trunk;³ furthermore, when the Emperor Louis-Napoleon visited the Salon it was recorded that he was so enraged by the affront of the work that he used his riding crop to give the painterly rump of the large bather a sharp wack. (Courbet is reputed to have retorted that it was a pity that the Emperor didn't rip the canvas because he would have sued him.)

These were singular and highly controversial works, therefore, which did much to challenge the conventions of the academic and the salon tradition and, even if the jury had been able to reject the pictures from the Salon,⁴ their sheer quality as paintings, their technical virtuosity and bravura (notwithstanding their 'objectionable' subject-matter), seems to have demanded that they be accorded prominent positions in the two Salons. Although we don't have photographs of the installation of the 1853 Salon, *The Bathers* must have been hung on the 'line' if Emperor Louis-Napoleon was able to get at it with his riding crop; and, in the case of *The Burial* in 1851, the emphatic scale of the work - over six metres long and over three metres high - meant that it was always going to dominate its environs even though it would have been hung cheek by jowl with a host of other works.

The conventions of exhibition presentation meant that the wall space of the Salon galleries was *choc-à-bloc* with pictures. Later nineteenth century photographs of the preparation of the Salon exhibitions show the jury and their attendants arranging all of the works out on the floor prior to the hanging and a fine hanging was one where every square centimetre of the wall could be covered by the works - frame against frame - with the favoured medium-sized pictures being

2 Faunce, S. and Nochlin, L. *Courbet Reconsidered*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988, 114.

3 *ibid.* Although Edmund About was a sympathetic critic he described her as "not so much a woman as a column of flesh, a rough-hewn tree-trunk, a solid."

4 In 1849, the Salon jury was made up of artists selected by their peers and not by the Government in collaboration with the Académie des Beaux-Arts and Courbet was awarded a gold medal which, technically speaking made him *hors concours* at subsequent Salons. Thus, when the Salon jury was again made up of conservatives in 1851 Courbet was allowed to submit what he liked.

hung at eye level (on the 'line') while the larger works occupied the upper reaches of the gallery where their scale meant that they could still be reasonably easily viewed. Notwithstanding this, smaller and minor works were often clustered around the larger works and it seemed to be the particular fate of the Barbizon school landscape painters during the period to have their paintings and etchings 'skied'; it was one way in which the jury could express its disapproval of their painting technique and subject matter even though most of the artists had begun to find favour with a growing bourgeois audience. Regular salon-goers knew, too, that you took your opera glasses (*les jumelles de théâtre*) along because it was often the only way to see many of the paintings which were sometimes eight or more metres up the wall.

Despite the vicissitudes brought about by a curmudgeonly jury and the fierce competition for wall space which a battalion of two thousand or so artists created, the annual Salon exhibition was a vast and often lucrative art fair where artists showed their wares. It provided up-to-date information on what the established artists were doing, it launched emerging artists, and, through its extensive system of prizes and commissions, it provided more-or-less instant cash benefits to a select group. With so few commercial outlets for the display of work one had to be 'in-it-to-win-it' and, even if it was like a vast bazaar, the Salon continued to be the single most important exhibition venue up until the end of the nineteenth century.

Nowadays, *The Painter's Studio* and *The Burial at Ornans* hang in splendour in a magnificently renovated nineteenth century railway station in Paris, the Musée d'Orsay (a fitting monument to capitalistic enterprise of the 1850s and 1860s if ever there was) having been moved from the Louvre in the 1980s. Before, they seemed to mark the end of an era and the critique they provided was one which functioned very much within the salon tradition. In the Musée d'Orsay, on the other hand, the paintings mark the emergence of a new form of avant-gardist art, one which proclaimed its originality, individuality and 'otherness' in manifestoes and which organised its claims to represent the new in often carefully orchestrated installations. Courbet may have created his *Pavillon Réelle* in a fit of pique, but the installation of such a major body of work, proclaiming the significance of Realism in so formidable and emphatic a manner (complete with Realist manifesto), had profound implications for modern art.

With no photographic documentation to go on, we can only imagine what Courbet's *Pavillon Réelle* looked like inside but the actual display of the paintings probably conformed to then-current conventions of hanging - both Ingres's and Delacroix's rooms in the main exposition galleries had a 'Salon look' about them - but, nevertheless, it was a first step in the gradual



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invention of the gallery space as an active component in the structuring of the meaning of works of art, one in which the artist began to take control of the display.

To the nineteenth century eye, the relationship between a picture and the surrounding space was neither here nor there; what mattered was that the work of art was wholly convincing in itself, that it made sense within the confines of its own frame.

However, the tension between what was 'in' the work of art and what was outside its 'frame' of reference became an increasingly insistent pictorial concern towards the end of the century. In the first instance this was very much limited to editorial decisions about what should go into the space and how the works could be sequenced in order to convey, in the most successful way, the artist's intentions. This is one reason why Courbet's example is so important because his *Pavillon Réelle* marks a decisive moment in the history of art exhibitions. Later the issue began to manifest itself in the works of art (every bit as much in sculpture as in painting) even though an Impressionist painting, say, continued to be surrounded by an elaborate beaux-arts frame.

This, in no small part, is the subject of a remarkable series of essays, which first appeared in *Artforum* in 1976, by Brian O'Doherty. In the first essay, 'Notes on the Gallery Space', O'Doherty argues that throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, artists began to put pressure on the frame. First this tended to occur in landscapes where edge-to-edge horizons are introduced and 'the powerful convention of the horizon zips easily enough through the limits of the frame'.⁵ He goes on to say that:

Once you know that a patch of landscape represents a decision to exclude everything around it, you are faintly aware of the space outside the picture.

The frame becomes a parenthesis.⁶

Monet's paintings, especially the huge studies of water lilies, are paradigmatic in this regard. They mark a profound change in the perceived function of painting and particularly of a painting's placement within a given space. In a real sense, they lack a tangible subject: they are all about evanescent light and, in the case of the paintings in the Orangerie in Paris where the immensely long works wrap around the oval rooms, one has the intensely physical sensation of being washed by bands of colour and of being bathed in ethereal light. It is a fleeting, contingent world where the stuff of the picture is not so much the presumed subject matter (the water lilies) as the paint itself and its own sensual properties.

5 O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Santa Monica & San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986, 19

⁶ *ibid.*



7 *ibid.*, 29
8 *ibid.*
9 *ibid.*, 34

When one goes to Giverny, Monet's beautiful house, garden and work place, one becomes aware that the breath-taking achievement of these paintings is very much tied to the way in which they were created in the studio. A visit to Delacroix's studio fifty years before would have been rather like walking into a huge cavernous

picture gallery with literally hundreds of paintings and objets d'art everywhere; in the case of Monet's studio, one's overwhelming impression is of light, space and seemingly acres of clean white wall area. There is an absence of clutter and a sense that each new work had been imagined as having its own discrete arena in which to function.

Brian O'Doherty argues that later in the twentieth century high modernism explored the nexus between art object and the gallery space with increasing urgency and, in the end, desperation. 'Now a participant in, rather than a passive support for, the art,' he writes, 'the wall became the locus of contending ideologies; and every new development had to come equipped with an attitude toward it.'⁷ And at the conclusion of the chapter he notes that the actual hanging of the works, the way, for instance, that Frank Stella's shaped canvases were displayed at Leo Castelli's gallery in 1964, created an 'unprecedented dialogue' between 'flatness, edge, format and wall.'⁸

The upshot, as O'Doherty rather acerbically notes, is an art that seeks to assert its individuality but which in the end seems to have the reassuring predictability of columns in a Greek temple.

The Color Field installation shot should be recognized [he writes] as one of the teleological endpoints of the modern tradition. There is something splendidly luxurious about the way the pictures and the gallery reside in a context that is fully sanctioned socially.⁹

There was, of course, no shortage of profoundly unsettling installations that challenged this modernist project. Two of Duchamp's works come to mind immediately - his *1,200 Bags of Coal* which was installed in the 1938 International Exhibition of Surrealism in New York and *Mill of String* which he created in New York four years later for another group exhibition. *1,200 Bags of*



Coal was a work where Duchamp attached somewhere around twelve hundred stuffed coal sacks to the ceiling of the exhibition space. Given his expressed antipathy to any kind of retinal painting, this move to draw the eye away from the wall and to focus on a space which modernism had generally eschewed, the ceiling, makes a great deal of sense and probably infuriated the other artists in the show. It turned the world upside down too and even if the the coal sacks were only stuffed with paper, the overpowering feeling of weight bearing down on the space would have been immediately sensed and, of course, the installation of these leaden sacks, probably pungent with coal dust, would have been seen as a drole commentary on renaissance and baroque ceiling paintings. It was a modern 'heaven' conceived of as brute and overbearing.

Duchamp's *One Mile of String* provided the perfect antidote to the increasingly spatial relationship being manufactured by modernist artists and curators between art object and gallery. It was as if some crazy spider had woven an impenetrable web through the gallery concentrating its attention on creating a dense net around art works and making the physical spaces between works into an obstacle course; it became as difficult to negotiate as a string of barbed-wire fences. Duchamp's installation (which now included all of the other exhibited work) made a mockery of giving works of art space to 'breathe' and, while Duchamp's can be read as an authoritarian one, as a statement about the changed conditions of modern art its impact was profound. It set the ground rules for much of the installation work that has appeared in the last fifty years or so and has made most artists especially conscious of the function of the site into which their artwork is placed.

Australia's engagement with installation art has been extremely significant in international terms in recent years. The emergence of the Sydney Biennale as one of the great regular international survey shows has provided a powerful focus; indeed *European Dialogue*, the 1979 Sydney Biennale exhibition was dominated by installations. They ranged from works by Australians like Mike Parr, Tom Arthur and Ewa Pachuka, to installations by international artists like Daniel Spoerri, Joseph Beuys, Nicklaus Lang and Mario Merz. Few could be more 'site specific' than Daniel Spoerri's - the crockery, utensils and detritus of a dinner party, held in the actual gallery on opening night, stuck down onto the linen cloths and presented as an

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index of the event as 'pictures' on the wall. A mark of the work's ephemeral nature was the way in which the 'evidence' continued to drop off the canvases for the duration of the exhibition, to be dutifully swept up against the wall by the gallery attendants.

Most of the 1979 Biennale work was shown in the Art Gallery of New South Wales itself but towards the end of the 1980s an increasing separation seems to have occurred as the more site specific work gravitated to the Bond Store and the art more closely aligned to the Salon tradition tended to find its way into the Art Gallery proper. Indeed, it's not without interest that the institutional pressures brought to bear upon artists in France during the mid-nineteenth century have been revisited recently in only subtly different ways as these huge survey shows get cranked up every year or so.

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The installation of art works as well as installation art proper have been significant concerns in many Plimsoll Gallery exhibitions since the mid-1980s. It may be because so many of the curators have been practising artists themselves that this is a theoretical and practical issue that is so frequently addressed. Also the exhibition program is not constrained by the need to sell work and so the necessity to deliver up the art works in 'bite size chunks' has not been an important criterion. Combined with this is the extraordinarily large number of artists who have actually come to Hobart either to make the work and/or to install it themselves.

Installations have been a particular concern of the curator of this present exhibition, Paul Zika, who has developed a series of site-specific and site-orientated exhibitions regularly since 1981. Edward Colless (himself involved in a series of 'scenographies' over the past few years) has argued that exhibitions like Paul Zika's *The Total Look* in 1991 have played an important part in calling into question late modern formalist aesthetics. These 'period installations', he says, 'have restored a qualitative role and a new stylistic density to the principle of "decor"'.¹⁰

When Stuart Koop reviewed Stephen Bush's exhibition at Robert Lindsay Gallery in 1994, he drew attention to Bush's preoccupation with repetition and reproduction, commenting on the fact that the image, *The Lure of Paris* had been painted five times during the period between 1992 and 1994.¹¹ And in May Lam's essay, 'The Figure or the Face?', for the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art exhibition of Jan Nelson's work in 1994, she discusses the manner in which Nelson utilises materials - felt, cane and plaster - which have traditionally been used for the endless reproduction of objects.¹² With the onset of the industrial revolution, mechanical reproduction and mimesis became extraordinarily powerful signifiers of the benefits of the new age. At the same time bravura displays of technical virtuosity, especially ones which involved

John R. Neeson 'Sixth Location', 1996 (detail)

¹⁰ Colless, Edward. 'The Total Look: Decor and Ambience.' *Art & Text* 41, 1991, 49

¹¹ Koop, Stuart. 'Stephen Bush.' *Art & Text*, 49, 1994, 77

¹² Williamson, Clare *et al.* *Jan Nelson*. Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1994. Includes essays by Juliana Engberg, May Lam and Kevin Murray.









the production of artefacts on a grand scale, were much valorised in the nineteenth century. The 1855 *Exposition Universelle*, for instance, emulated to some degree, the creation of Paxton's 1851 Crystal Palace buildings with its miles of steel and acres of glass; and, as previously mentioned, into Courbet's *Pavillon Réelle* went two masterpieces, *The Painter's Studio* and *The Burial at Ornans* which were meant to be didactic examples in the tradition of painting 'grands machines' - immensely complex works of art usually involving large numbers of life size figures.

This is now the second time that Jan Nelson and Stephen Bush's *South Face* has been created - the first site was the Canberra Contemporary Art Space in August, 1995 - and the repetitions and reproductions that are evident in the installation will obviously attract

the the viewer's attention, as will its scale. Not only is the work reproduced for the second time but the image of an alpine landscape, the 'South Face', is a copy of a reproduction gleaned from a mountaineering handbook, which has then been 'doubled' as the artists paint both the illustration we might see looking at the book and its mirror image, created by reversing the slide used to project the illustration onto the wall for the purpose of copying.

Included in the installation too is *Babar in the*

Mall, a photograph by Bush of Babar - the quintessential French emblem of 'civilisation' - an endearing elephant who returns to his native 'habitat' having lived 'modernity' and who is thus able to bring to his kingdom the fruits of his experience of modernism.

Both Stephen Bush and Jan Nelson have been particularly interested in the avant-garde as a theoretical issue in their respective practices. An earlier work by Jan Nelson, *Conversation between Freud and Darwin*, also forms part of the installation - Freud and Darwin, two 'originals' of modern thought find their way onto copies of Wedgwood containers as figures cast in relief. Now the ideas that are 'contained' in their theories have, like everything else in this era of mechanical reproduction, become infinitely reproducible. Not only were they great patriarchal figures but, as May Lam argues, both men had much to say about women: 'Both married women [she writes] who would only produce children [and] their theories endorsed such a division of labour.'¹³ 'Both men found women ill-equipped to compete in the world - for work, for survival, or for intellectual attention.'¹⁴ The implicit irony of this is surely a significant ingredient of the installation, *South Face*, which is, of course, the product, a scion, of the *collaboration* between Jan Nelson and Stephen Bush.

In Chris McAuliffe's essay on Stephen Bush's work, 'Producing the Goods',¹⁵ the reader's attention is drawn to the way in which his *Lure of Paris* paintings call up conventions

¹³ *ibid.*, 9

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ McAuliffe, Chris. 'Producing the Goods.' *Art & Text*, 53, 1996



of academic practice in the nineteenth century. Indeed one is tempted to ask, given the ease, nowadays, with which techniques of mechanical reproduction allow one to reproduce large works on canvas or as murals, why one should so bloody mindedly paint the same image over and over again on such a scale and with such a laborious manual process. And we might ask the same question, too, of both of them, in the case of *South Face*.

Clearly they challenge the late-modern expectation that somehow an artist's output should necessarily always be new; secondly that it should necessarily be an 'individual' contribution; and thirdly that the copy must be seen as a denigrated vehicle for the generation of ideas - after all each one of these works, the installations and the individual paintings is a copy and an 'original'. There is also a humorous critique of avant-garde painting, for here is a work on the grand scale, but delivered up as the copy. Nevertheless, one might argue, too, that there is the sheer pleasure of executing again a really successful installation or painting. Craft skill, technical virtuosity and the ability to copy were tangible values that were held in high regard in the nineteenth century but they have not been valorised terms in contemporary art. One senses, however, in installations like *South Face*, that this ability to reproduce the key elements of the work with exactness and on the heroic scale of the Salon tradition is a precise and meaningful gesture in itself. The multiple reproduction of the various components in *South Face* speaks volumes about the conditions of artistic production in the late twentieth century, but in this dense and complex installation we share, too, the exhilaration that comes from actually making those ideas work.



Earlier it was noted that the well-trained nineteenth century Salon goer knew that it was *de rigueur* to carry one's opera glasses along to the exhibition in order to be able to take in all of the work, much of which would be 'skied' and visually inaccessible without these aides. These were often the works which were considered by the jury to be 'discards' - minor works of no consequence.

One of the really intriguing aspects about many of Claire Barclay's objects, and the installations which are created with them, is that attention to the scale of the space and the physical positioning of the viewer in relation to the objects are such paramount concerns. In several of her earlier installations long shelves were placed high on the

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wall, usually above the 'eyeline'. These shelves, which seem pristine at first and sometimes carry an array of neatly arranged multiples, often have their undersides smeared with soap or some other viscous substance. It's as if one is experiencing vicariously the dirty traces left behind after a less-than-enthusiastic and rather dilatory house cleaning. Soap, lard, fat and grease which have a transformative effect in their active form as agents for cleaning, burning energy, or lubricating moving parts, become traps for dust and dirt - waste products - in their latent form. In its active form, for instance, soap, which is made from a combination of oils and fats, is used to dissolve and remove the traces of waste on our bodies - dried skin, excess oil, hair; as a viscous residue it gathers up these abject substances as piquant reminders of the contingent nature of things.

Around the home (and Claire Barclay's compelling and strange objects are familiars in this regard) it's places like the undersides of wash basins, of kitchen shelves, the concealed edges of tables and chairs, the space beneath a bed, where these residues gather. They are not usually spaces which are the purview of the adult but they are, quintessentially, the domain of the child. It's almost as though the order, symmetry and pristine quality of many of the multiples and other objects which she makes and installs are metaphors for the world of the adult when, we might say, the super-ego has really kicked in; on the other hand, often the scaling and the positioning of the viewer in relation to the work, as well as the shape and feel of things, seems to trigger a memory of some formative, primal moment, a moment when the child's consciousness of self is heightened by a particular experience or event.



From this point of view, the manipulation of the space and the placement of objects in that environment are extremely important. For it is precisely in the domain of installation (where one moves beyond a primarily scopic experience) that the artist can draw particular attention to the way in which one's consciousness of one's own body - touch, smell, or taste, for instance - can trigger memory; and the pleasure, pain, awe, terror, horror or elation, experienced in that formative moment or event, is thus relived aesthetically.

The most recent work seems to me to continue this relentless exploration and if one detects a slight shift in focus, it's perhaps that it has become much more sensual. There's a deliberate brittleness about many of the earlier objects which is there in the materials - starched cloth, ceramic vessels, aluminium - and in the installations themselves. True, the effect is leavened by the way in which smeared organic matter is incorporated in the works but they still seem to retain that fragile brittleness. The new works, on the other hand, seem almost hedonistic in comparison - the materials appear less resilient, more pliable, the colour is more sumptuous; and if there is a scopic intensity about much of the earlier work, these newer familiars convey a palpable sense of touch, of the artist seeking to convey a sense of *forming experience through experimenting with the feel of things*.

One of the claims made earlier in this introduction is that a profound change has occurred in the way in which the space of the gallery was perceived in relationship to, say, a painting. Brian O'Doherty notes that in some late Courbets and certainly in the paintings of the Impressionists, one begins to see the emergence of a type of painting where the limits of the frame appear only as a kind of bracketing. What is 'pictured' within the frame, so to speak, is a quantifiable slice selected from a continuum. As I mentioned, what the modern eye might see as an immense visual problem - wall-to-wall hangings of paintings - was much less of a problem to the practised nineteenth century eye precisely because the 'world' depicted within the space of the picture was seen as being a self-contained one. A number of commentators have drawn attention to the fact that the invention of photography hastened this change in perception. For the photographer often consciously utilises the frame to determine what's going to be *in* the picture and what will be excluded. Implicit in this phenomenon is the recognition that what is *outside* the frame is a powerful determinant of what will eventually

constitute the picture. Throughout the twentieth century, as O'Doherty has so convincingly written, this dialectic between the art work and the space it occupies has been a significant theoretical problem confronting artists, curators and theoreticians. William Seitz, for instance, in a landmark exhibition of Monet's work at the Museum of Modern Art in 1960, actually took the beaux-arts frames off the paintings and hung the work flush to the wall and, as O'Doherty argues, this made one incredibly conscious of the way in which Monet's work 'held the wall'.¹⁶

John Neeson's recent work has been very much engaged with this as a theoretical problem. His installation of paintings at the Powder Magazine, on Hobart's Domain, is an intense study of that space and it sets up a fascinating interplay between the painting and the wall (as a two-dimensional surface) and the painting and the installation space (as a volume in which the painter and viewer move). In each work, a section of the wall is submitted to the absolutely unrelenting gaze of the artist and the aim is to produce as near as possible a replication of what the artist sees and can touch, so that when the painting sits flat on the wall in the space it represents, it will actually provide a convincing illusion of that which it replaces. Each of the 'pictures' is surrounded by an illusionistic frame and this has the effect of isolating that which is represented (of declaring it as painting) although, the frame, too, is an illusion and reads as flat. So, each of the paintings conveys a startlingly realistic representation of the two-dimensional surface of a section of the wall and a strong sense of its structure and texture. It is painting about the surface, which sits flat on that surface and, from this point of view, 'what you see is what you see': the painting is created as if it is an index, a rubbing or frottage, of the section of the wall it represents.

There is, however, one further element which is included in each of the paintings. A reflective sphere sits as if upon an imaginary shelf created at the intersection between the panelled lower wall and the upper reaches of the space (this strong horizontal line cuts through each of the works and creates an important visual link between them as paintings). The sphere allows John Neeson to consider a segment of the vaulted white ceiling and the maze of vertical and horizontal beams or, in at least one instance, the fine shape of an arched window, as it is reflected in the mirrored surface. Whereas the illusion of the wall surface is almost reminiscent of wallpaper and there is an evenness in the manner in which the light is displaced across the surface, in the space represented in the reflected sphere the artist is

particularly interested to convey the sense of ambient light and the manner in which this changes as one moves through the space. So the wall remains as a constant, a boundary, while the space observed in the sphere becomes a world of contingency and change. The one seems solid and dependable - touchable - the other speaks of intangibility. In keeping, too, with the wall-as-constant, and the reflected space as a volume in which the artist moves around, so John Neeson feels free to position himself at different points and at

different distances to the wall in order to depict what he sees. This is emphasised in the one large painting where the reflective sphere is depicted three times and in each case, he shifts his position in order to paint a different area of the space.

This is very much an installation *about painting an installation space*, of seeking to convey, in an intensely observed series of pictures, what it's like to be *in* that space for such a concentrated period of time.

The limits of the space can be touched and defined and this is conveyed emphatically by the way in which the paintings sit against the wall; what occurs in that space, however, is much more equivocal and uncertain.

In a world cluttered with reproductions and repetitions, the mass produced and the double, the palpable impact and effect which space and objects have upon the body continues to engage artists. All four artists assert this in these installations not only with perspicacity and an intense and critical understanding of the history of this kind of exhibition, but often with wry humour. That ability to play with ideas and yet to convey a profound sense of the significance of the issues which have been discussed here is no small achievement; indeed, it's a really tangible outcome of this exhibition.

CLAIRE BARCLAY

Born 1968. Lives in Scotland.

Studies

- 1990 B.A. (Hons) in Fine Art, Glasgow School of Art
1993 Masters in Fine Art, Glasgow School of Art

Selected solo exhibitions/projects since 1990

- 1994 'Claire Barclay: New Works', Transmission Gallery, Glasgow
1995 Installation in 'The Cube', Canberra Contemporary Art Space

Selected group exhibitions/projects since 1990

- 1990 'Womanhouse Project', Castlemilk, Glasgow
'Five from Glasgow', Hordaland Kunstner Sentrum, Bergen, Norway
1991 'The Living-room Project', Glasgow
'Windfall '91, Seamans Mission, Glasgow
'Speed', Transmission Gallery, Glasgow
1992 'Invisible Cities', Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh
'Contact', Transmission Gallery, Glasgow
1993 'International Departures', Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen, Germany
1994 'Art Unlimited: Multiples of the 60's and 90's', Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow. A British Arts Council touring exhibition
'The Institute of Cultural Anxiety', Institute of Contemporary Arts, London
'In Situ', Old stables block, Castlemilk, Glasgow
1995 'Taking Form' Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh
'Swarm', Scottish Arts Council's Gallery and touring
'Scot Osz '95', Ujlak Kiallitolterem, Budapest
'Exchange Resources', Catalyst Arts, Belfast
'Multiples exhibition', Gallery Constantinople, Queanbeyan, N.S.W.
1996 'Scottish artists' group show', Happy Gallery, Student Cultural Centre, Belgrade

Awards

- 1995/96 Scottish Arts Council Overseas Residency, Canberra School of Art and the Tasmanian School of Art at Hobart

Selected bibliography since 1990

- McArthur, Euan, 'Claire Barclay: Transmission Gallery', *Art Monthly*, No. 10, 1994.
Schmidt, Eva, 'On Literality and on Speaking Reality in today's art', *International Departure*, exhibition catalogue, Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen, 1993.

JOHN R. NEESON

Born 1946. Lives in Melbourne.

John R. Neeson is represented in Tasmania by Dick Bett Gallery, Hobart, and Latrobe Street Gallery, Melbourne.

Studies

- 1967 Fellowship Diploma (Painting), Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
- 1970 Trained Secondary Teachers' Certificate, Secondary Teacher's College, Melbourne
- 1995 M.A. Monash University, Melbourne

Selected solo exhibitions since 1990

- 1990 Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
- 1991 Realities Gallery, Melbourne
- 1992 Macquarie Galleries, Sydney
- 1993 'First Location', Linden Gallery, St. Kilda Arts Centre
Monash Studios, Melbourne
- 1994 'Third Location', C.F.M.E.U. Studio, Trades Hall, Melbourne
- 1995 'Fourth Location', Tower Studio, Queen's College, Melbourne
'Fifth Location', Kevin Dossier Pavilion, Benalla, Victoria

Selected group exhibitions since 1990

- 1990 'Fire and Ice: Aspects of Contemporary Australian Surrealism', Manly Art Gallery and Museum, Sydney
- 1991 'Art and Architecture', Faculty of Architecture, University of Melbourne
'From the Landscape', Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane
- 1992 'Miniatures', Realities Gallery, Melbourne
'Contemporary Drawing', Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane
'Rediscovery - Australian Artists in Europe, 1982-1992', Expo '92, Seville and the Australian Embassy, Paris
'Inherited Absolute: Artists with Children', Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
'The Angelic Space: A Celebration of Piero Della Francesca', Monash University Gallery, Melbourne
- 1993 'Arrangement - Australian Still Life, 1973-1993', Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne
- 1995 'Chameleon: A Decade', Long Gallery, Hobart
'Australia Felix', Benalla Art Gallery, Victoria

Awards

- 1981 Visual Arts Board Project Grant
- 1983 Visual Arts Board Overseas Studio Residency
- 1994 Artist in Residence, Tower Studio, Queen's College, Melbourne
C.F.M.E.U. Studio, Trades Hall, Melbourne
- 1995 Artist in Residence, The Bundanon Trust
- 1996 Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship

Selected bibliography since 1990

- Chanin, Eileen (ed), *Contemporary Australian Painting*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1990.
- Baker, James, *From the Landscape*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, 1991.
- Colless, Edward, *Rediscovery - Australian Artists in Europe, 1982-1992*, exhibition catalogue, University of Tasmania and A.E.T.A.
- Gertsakis, Elizabeth, *Inherited Absolute: Artists with Children*, exhibition catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1992.
- Engberg, Juliana, *The Angelic Space: A celebration of Piero Della Francesca*, exhibition catalogue, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne, 1992.
- Armour, Mimi, 'A conversation with John R. Neeson', *Friends of Heide Newsletter*, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Summer, 1993-94.
- Chameleon: A Decade*, exhibition catalogue, CAST, 1995.
- Wolfe, Ross, *Samstag's Class of '96*, exhibition catalogue, University of South Australia, 1996.

STEPHEN BUSH

Born, 1958. Lives in Melbourne.

Stephen Bush is represented by Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne.

Studies

- 1976-78 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
1979 Graduate Diploma of Fine Arts, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

Selected solo exhibitions since 1990

- 1991 Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
'Claiming: An installation of paintings by Stephen Bush', Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne,
Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia and the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut, USA
1994 'Stephen Bush: The Lure of Paris', Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne
1995 'Stephen Bush: Venetian Red', Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne

Selected group exhibitions since 1990

- 1991 'Contemporary Landscapes', Deakin University Gallery, Geelong
1992 'Angelic Space: A celebration of Piero Della Francesca', Monash University Gallery, Melbourne
1993 'Survey 14: Images of the Geelong Region', Geelong Art Gallery
'Interim Space', Smith Street Post Office, Collingwood
'A Collaboration Project - Jan Nelson and Stephen Bush', Temple Studio, Melbourne
1994 'Persona Cognita', Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne
'Bad Toys', Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
'Moet and Chandon national touring exhibition'
1995 'South Face', a collaboration project between Jan Nelson and Stephen Bush, Canberra Contemporary Art Space
'Smorgon Collection', Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
1996 'Compost', various sites in Norwood, Adelaide Festival
'How Say You', Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne and touring nationally
'Painting and Photography', Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne and touring nationally

Selected bibliography since 1990

- Cass, Naomi; Murray, Kevin and Engberg, Juliana, *Claiming: An installation of Paintings by Stephen Bush*, exhibition catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1991.
Cameron, Dan, *Historical non-imperatives*, exhibition catalogue, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut, USA, 1991.
Dauth, Louise, 'Heroes, Humour, Parody and Wit', *Broadsheet*, Vol 20, No. 2, 1991.
Ludeman, Brenda, 'Love of the Gendered Subject', *Agenda* No. 17, 1991.
Engberg, Juliana, *Angelic Space: A Celebration of Piero Della Francesca*, exhibition catalogue, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne, 1992.
McAuliffe, Chris, 'Stephen Bush: Serial Originality', *Stephen Bush: The Lure of Paris*, exhibition catalogue, Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne, 1994.
Koop, Stuart, 'Stephen Bush', *Art and Text*, No. 49, 1994.
Engberg, Juliana, *Persona Cognita*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne, 1994.
King, Natalie, *Bad Toys*, exhibition catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1994.
Smith, Trevor, *South Face*, exhibition catalogue, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, 1995.
McFarlane, Jenny, 'South Face: A collaborative project', *Eyeline Magazine*, No. 29, Summer, 1995.
McAuliffe, Chris, 'Producing the Goods', *Art and Text*, No. 53, January, 1996.
Graney, Dave and Murray, Kevin, *How Say You*, exhibition catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1996.

JAN NELSON

Born 1955. Lives in Melbourne.

Jan Nelson is represented by Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne.

Studies

1981-83 B.A., Victorian College of the Arts

Selected solo exhibitions since 1990

- 1991 'The Long Century', Realities Gallery, Melbourne
1994 'Jan Nelson', Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
 'Mont Blanc, 1969', Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne
1995 'Incident', Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne

Selected group exhibitions since 1990

- 1992 'Inherited Absolute: Artists with Children', Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
 'Skin', Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia
1993 'A Collaboration Project - Jan Nelson and Stephen Bush', Temple Studio, Melbourne
 'Confess and Conceal', Art Gallery of Western Australia and touring Asia
1994 'The Aberrant Object: Women, Dada and Surrealism', Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne
 'Artists thinking about Science', A.N.A.T., Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane
1995 'Australian Perspecta '95', Art Gallery of New South Wales
 'South Face', a collaboration project between Jan Nelson and Stephen Bush, Canberra Contemporary Art Space
1996 'The Lovers', Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne

Awards

- 1983 Visual Arts Board Overseas Studio Residency
 Potter Foundation Grant, Melbourne
 Sir Russell Drysdale Drawing Prize
1984 Visual Arts/Craft Board Project Grant
1986 Victorian Ministry for the Arts Painting Grant
 Artist in Residence, Victorian College of the Arts
1987 Visual Arts/Craft Board, Half Standard Grant
1990 Visual Arts/Craft Board Project Grant
1993 Visual Arts/Craft Board, Creative Development Grant

Selected bibliography since 1990

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- Ludeman, Brenda, *The White Island: Jan Nelson*, exhibition catalogue, Realities Gallery, Melbourne, 1991.
Koop, Stuart, *Contemporary Landscapes*, exhibition catalogue, Deakin University Gallery, Victoria, 1991.
Adams, Jude, 'Something Borrowed, Nothing Blue, Something Old, Nothing New', *Artlink*, No. 2, 1992.
Confess and Conceal, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1993.
Engberg, Juliana; McKenzie, Robyn; Wach, Kenneth and Marsh, Anne, exhibition catalogue, *The Aberrant Object: Women, Dada and Surrealism*, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne, 1994.
Creed, Barbara, 'The Aberrant Object: Women, Dada and Surrealism', *Art Monthly Australia*, No. 69, May, 1994.
Lam, May; Murray, Kevin and Engberg, Juliana, *Jan Nelson*, exhibition catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1994.
O'Halloran, David, *Artists thinking about Science*, exhibition catalogue, A.N.A.T., 1994.
Annear, Judy; James, Bruce and Miller, Sarah, *Australian Perspecta '95*, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of N.S.W., 1995.
Smith, Trevor, *South Face*, exhibition catalogue, Canberra Contemporary Art Space.
McFarlane, Jenny, 'South Face: A collaborative project', *Eyeline Magazine*, No. 29, Summer, 1995.
Engberg, Juliana, *The Lovers*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne, 1995.
Engberg, Juliana, 'Jan Nelson: White Noise', *Art and Text*, No. 51, May, 1995.

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